



Call for federal action before wildlife icon vanishes

# 'Protect koala now'

BRISBANE — Conservationists have called on federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett to list the koala as a vulnerable species before it vanishes from the wild.

Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) chief executive officer Deborah Tabart this week wrote to Mr Garrett, urging him to protect the marsupial in federal legislation because state governments were failing them.

Ms Tabart said that while the koala was on the priority list for species conservation, there was a two-year evaluation time and, she warned, 4000 animals could die in south-east Queensland alone before action was taken.

"I am starting to wonder whether you are committed to protecting the koala," she wrote.

"When you spoke to an AKF scientist pre-election, you said you were committed, but now we see you risking a two-year timeframe for a steeply declining population.

"I believe you personally know the koala is in trouble."

A spokesman for Mr Garrett yesterday said he had given the undertaking to re-assess the species' status in 2008, in recognition of its iconic standing.

The government was also considering the main threats to koalas in the wild as part of its review of the National Koala Con-

servation Strategy, the spokesman said.

But Ms Tabart told AAP she believed the government feared the result of better protecting the koala would be a loss of political donations from developers.

Speaking from a Save the Koala Day event at Dreamworld on the Gold Coast yesterday, she said the protection of koala habitat was extremely politically sensitive.

"Because koala habitat is so extensive and affects so many plans on the east coast of Australia, I think developers are saying (to governments) we lose this, and you're in trouble," she said.



AT RISK: A koala rests in a tree at Sydney Wildlife World yesterday.